

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Fishing Trip Almost Nets Whopper

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

A top space official, who went salmon fishing last year with Boeing bigwigs, tried afterward to award his fishing companions a "wasteful" \$200,000 contract.

The story is told in confidential memos from National Aeronautics and Space Administration files.

The memos identify the obliging space official as Jack A. Jones, a quality control chief based in Houston. He was taken fishing by corporate executives during a visit to Boeing's Seattle headquarters.

Another space official, Joseph H. Levine, was included on the fishing trip but played no part in seeking the \$200,000 contract for his hosts.

The incident was turned into drama when the complainant, James Maxwell, died of a heart attack after he brought the scandal to the attention of NASA investigators. Friends say his diligence in pressing the investigation helped bring on the fatal attack.

Maxwell was upset because his name was listed as the NASA engineer who had requested the \$200,000 contract. The money was supposed to be spent for research equipment he thought was unnecessary. According to a confidential report, he saw "absolutely no need for this purchase request" and considered it "wasteful to spend (the) money."

It was Jones, not Maxwell, who sought the \$200,000 contract for Boeing, the documents charge. Jones allegedly began pushing for the contract immediately after

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he returned from the fishing trip.

Maxwell complained that the use of his name "implicates me in a violation of law." He died before NASA completed its investigation, which resulted in cancelling the contract. However, Jones and Levine got off with a mild reprimand.

Footnote: A NASA spokesman confirmed that Jones and Levine were entertained by Boeing and acknowledged that Jones sought a \$200,000 contract for Boeing after his return. Norman Wynn, one of Boeing's hosts confirmed that the fishing trip took place, called the affair "insignificant" and hung up on our reporter, Marc Smolonsky. Jones and Levine did not return our calls.

Surveillance Subsidy — When local police or prosecutors need special help to spy on alleged criminals, they turn to Uncle Sam for help. During the past seven years, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration has responded with unusual generosity.

The agency has distributed \$160.8 million to support 1,929 intelligence-related projects around the country. The figures were provided to Rep. Bella S. Abzug (D-N.Y.), whose Government Information Sub-committee is investigating federal snooping.

Approximately \$2.5 million was earmarked for the "purchase of electronic surveillance equipment," according to the LEAA report provided to Abzug.

Incredibly, \$1.3 million of the bugging equipment went to states that either prohibited wiretaps or had no laws on bugging.

California, for example, outlaws wiretapping except in unique circumstances. Yet, the federal government gave California authorities \$98,596 for sophisticated surveillance equipment.

The California Department of Justice acquired, among other things 10 "beeper" systems—which allow police to follow vehicles at a distance, 15 voice-activated tape recorders, 26 miniature microphones and headsets, and five "intelligence kits" at \$2,500 apiece.

Other states that prohibited wiretaps at the time they received their LEAA grants — Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan and North Carolina — were supplied with body transmitters, auto tracking devices and other unspecified "technical surveillance equipment."

Even when money is doled out to states where wiretapping is legal, there is little method to LEAA's mad giveaway. Official bugging is legal, for example, in New Jersey. There state authorities spent \$206,093 in federal funds to buy eavesdropping equipment to handle 808 authorized wiretaps.

But, the report noted, there was "no correlation between the number of wiretap authorizations and the amount of funds expended for electronic surveillance equipment."

Clearly, LEAA exhibits little control over the local spending and use of the equipment. The report points out that 25 states refused to provide LEAA with an itemized breakdown for the bugging equipment bought with LEAA money.

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